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ABSTRACT

The most difficult, self-effacing, and intangible role in higher education today is that of top management policy determination. Trustees carry the key management policy role and should neither be diverted nor shrink from it. Trustees must constantly assess their progress and modify their plans. Six points are suggested: (1) Trustees should devote more time and presence as individuals to Board affairs. (2) Trustees must give more attention to establishing a clear interface with administrators. (3) More improved staff preparation for Board meetings can increase efficiency. (4) Board's structure should be designed to carry the major workloads. (5) Boards should set aside time for relaxed exchange of views concerning problem areas and future options. (6) Trustees should open better channels of communication with various institutional constituencies. (Author/PG)

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Where Are the Managers in Higher Education?

John W. Pocock

A management consultant, who is a board chairman, offers pointed suggestions for fellow trustees.

The answer to the query posed by the title of my talk can be given quickly and directly. The top managers of higher education are here in this room today. At least a solid representative sample of the managers. I hope we know it. There are many today who question whether, in truth, we are wise enough to manage that which we are managers of. From all sides we are inundated with a torrent of advice as to how to improve our stewardship. Indeed, crouched hesitantly on our eroding managerial sandbar with the overhanging curl of the educational apocalypse about to sweep us under, I wonder why I should speak at all since I have nothing hysterical to say. But this, to me, is the main point of the whole matter. Why join the hysteria?

So that I may not abuse the privilege of platform let me clearly state the constraints on my qualifications to talk at all. Although management has been my profession for almost thirty years, today I speak mainly from the background of a small, private, liberal arts college. The impending doom of such colleges has been well advertised. I sense that our current problems, real and fancied, and the future horrors to be visited upon us are not entirely unique and can be extended to much larger and smaller institutions, both public and private. Obviously, my own experience allows me to speak to only a portion of the picture – but I do feel there are some rather simple things that need saying concerning our management of our assigned institutions.

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Impressed as I am with our society's growing appreciation of our basic problems and with the numerous programs in being, proposed and under discussion – all aimed to ease our lot as a class – my main theme is that we, as trustees and regents, should put greater reliance upon internal rather than external salvation and get on with our jobs as top managers. There will be no news in what I have to say. The question is have we heard it. The suspicion is that we have not.

Keyes Beech tells of a period during the unfortunate goings on in Indochina when correspondents were experiencing a somewhat random expectancy of survival. One correspondent returned to base to be told that he had been reported killed the day before. His immediate response was "Did people say nice things about me?" We can hope that people said nice things about us.

I suggest that two points can be drawn from this, fitting our own situation. First, there's a lot of life left in our institutions. The flaws get the headlines. Second, you really need a deep abiding sense of humor to ease the load. A sense of humor may be as important as wisdom in today's environment.

And so to management. I see no virtue in reopening the philosophical dialogue as to whether the trustee-regent system is the best management apparatus. My opening proposition is that we are going to be around for quite a while and so should get on with the job.

First, let me remark upon the distinction between leadership, management and administration. Today we are having a variety of new roles suggested to us while at the same time we are charged with not really knowing what our traditional role is.

Leadership is that quality, in an individual or group, which sweeps in the intellectual, emotional, and physical allegiances of the institutional constituencies and binds them in common cause behind the leader. One hopes that the leader is a manager and has time to manage. But leaders are not always managers and leadership is not management. Our institutions – educational, industrial, political – have learned this lesson the hard way through the years. But we forget it.

The leadership role must be with the president – the man whose entire being must be dedicated to the institution he leads. He may be an astute manager – but he has other priorities for many of his endeavors. We select the man, follow and support him in his leadership and continuously appraise his performance. Should he falter we may look to another. But we do not move to take over the leadership. This is no role for a Board or for the Chairman. This has been said many times and many ways. It is the first commandment of trusteeship. In these days of upheaval, it is easy for a board to drift into an augmentation of its role. It only leads to trouble.

The other side of our board role is the task of administration. Much

of what has been written concerning ways for improving the effectiveness of our institutions deals with administration – matters of budgetary control, facilities, utilization and the like. I would agree that such administration is management with a small "m" – and it is important – but beware! Since many trustees have considerable administrative competence and "want to help" it is perhaps only natural for some of us to divert from our role of top policy management and get involved in "assisting" in some of the administrative soft spots. While there is no denying that such can be helpful at times, those times are fewer than we care to admit. The real danger is that we take our eyes away from our true management policy role. We are the top managers of our institutions. Our second commandment might well be to regularly appraise overall administrative performance – but don't become participants in administration.

The most difficult, self-effacing and intangible – and the most critical – role in higher education today is that of top management policy determination. This is our task – it belongs to no others. And there is really no place to hide.

It is a bit unnerving to realize that most of us entered into our trusteeships with great enthusiasm forming a protective shield around our considerable ignorance as to what our jobs were all about. Regardless of our success as professionals in other fields, each of us starts as an amateur in educational trusteeship.

One of the ingenuous traits of the amateur is that, thrust into a new world, he assumes that his own particular experience of other worlds is trivial to the requirements of this new one. Nothing could be more wrong. Granted that a short period of grace is due while the new trustee becomes acquainted with his new camp, there is no occasion for prolonged stalling. The fundamental steps of the management process are simple, clear and unchanging. They apply to our Board role. We should be about the business of their application. We know better than we're doing. To summarize:

- We trustees carry the key management policy role and should neither be diverted nor shrink from it.
- For better or worse in the foreseeable future management improvement starts with us, simply because we're in the job.
- Amateurism becomes professionalism in a short time under fire; there are no "instant" trustees.
- The fundamentals of management are constant across all enterprises from the home to the corporation, and we know them.
- We should stop our shouting and get on with our business.

There's nothing dramatic in this. But management is not dramatic.

It's the results that are. So now let's repeat our management catechism.

Our task is to get from here to there. We must know where we are. We must know where we want to be. We must consider the routes by which we make our way. We must select our route and plan our steps. We must constantly assess our progress, modify our plan and press on. In top management jargon the sequence might be stated thus:

- Establish our appraisal of the *current situation* in the current environment.
- Identify the major *significant pressures and trends* in the environment that will affect our situation.
- State our *objectives and goals* in tangible, understandable terms.
- Examine our *program options* to carry us toward these objectives.
- Estimate what it will take in *resources* to execute the options and appraise our present and potential resources in talent, time, funds and facilities and balance them against the requirements – probably modified.
- Select our option and set *management policy* to progress the program.
- Follow the *execution of the program*, revising and modifying policy and program as required.

There is no magic in this nor is it new. Yet the importance of this top management cycle is not grasped nor acted upon conclusively. I suspect we shy away from the doing, not because the steps are obscure, but because the doing is so difficult. There are no detailed instructions as to how to proceed – only broad guidelines. The process must be tailored for each institution for we each have unique elements in our own situation. It is a creative undertaking and requires a good deal of hard thinking and soul-searching. It's plain, hard work.

I wish that I could report that my own Board had completed this chore – it's never really completed – to our own satisfaction. We're working at it – we have a long way to go. May I give you a note or two simply as information.

Several years back we determined to set down, in writing, a clear expression of our Board's position as to the type of institution we were and wished to be, the character of the educational experience we wished to provide, and the nature of the policies and practices by which these ends were being and would be met. This was really the first step of my sequence. We set two provisos:

- The statement would give central attention to our present institutional being – a confirmation of our current institutional concept and the supporting policy and practice, without becoming overentangled in futures.
- The statement should be acceptable to each and every trustee as a statement of group position.

We wanted a base from which to start. Our Board was (and is) composed of wise, warm, dedicated people, many of whom have had a long and beneficial association with the college. We respected one another, worked in harmony and felt a strong common sympathy for the needs and values of the school. Although we recognized that the essential commonality of our thinking was already established, we agreed it would be well to put it on the record. This simple recording of our common position took over two years to complete. Why?

Those of you have, in a like way, made the attempt to reduce broad concerns and general understandings to more specific terms know the answer. We were all for our unique type of educational experience and against sin – but we weren't sure just what the specific elements of our unique educational experience were nor were we quite sure exactly what constituted sin. This exercise brought about a good many helpful happenings well beyond the preparation of the statement itself:

- We found out we didn't know as much about our school as we thought we did. We set about learning.
- We found out that we had been, in our Board discussions, glossing over some bothersome variations of individual interpretation and opinion. We either ironed these out or clearly defined the variant views and the reasons behind them.
- We found that we had postponed establishing positions on a number of matters because we sensed an awkward disagreement among ourselves. We faced up to the problems, found our disagreements were usually minor and established positions.
- We found that as individuals each of us had something worth saying, that the others had something worth listening to and that we were bringing a new breadth and depth to our activity as a group. We liked it.

I would highly commend such an exercise to those who have not yet done it in considered depth and scope. For regardless of the nature of the enterprise or institution we manage, the first requirement is to know where we are and what we are.

A few more notes on other links of the top management policy cycle – as you analyze the pressures and trends that beset your institution, look for those unique and pertinent to your own situation. There are trends within trends. The well-recognized, broad, across-the-board shifts are not always equally felt. The regional variations in economic pressures in your own constituencies are not always those of the national average. A downward drift in enrollment applications may come from a subtle, unnoticed shift in your own curriculum priorities or acceptance practices. There really is no average institution. It will take some data and research to come up with such

analyses. If you are not set up for this research I suggest you get set up posthaste. We're going to need such continuing analysis for all future time.

As you set your future objectives and examine your options, dream a little. Dream some bad dreams too. Set both a high road and a low road. The high road is our goal but at times we may be forced back to the low road to preserve the continuity and coherence of our program. It is easier to keep our balance when climbing than when dropping down for another try. Let's plan ahead for the inevitable descents so that we don't fall off the mountain.

When we finally determine our optimum policy, let's not set it in concrete for all time and turn our backs. Conditions change and so must policy. This isn't being equivocal – it's being flexible. The job of policy-making is never done. We should be alert and ready to review and modify our decisions at any time.

And when our policy is passed to administration for implementation, let's be clear in our transmission and precise in the feedback reporting we desire. This is the living management policy cycle. This is our major mission. This is the requirement we simply cannot avoid.

This brings us face to face with a proposition we all must sense but are often slow to accept. Too often we are not organized to carry out this responsibility effectively. Board management in our institutions of higher education is no longer a random affair. I overstate the case because I wish to drive home the point. We've always been conscientious. We've attended our meetings and accepted our chores. We've reacted to problem situations – and, on the whole, surprisingly well. But simple reaction is not enough today. We can't stop the world and get off to collect our thoughts. We must move to get ahead and stay ahead of the game. This means that the conduct of our Board affairs must be overhauled and our organized capability and capacity developed so that we can exercise our management and policy responsibility more effectively.

I suggest six points for your consideration.

- *We must devote more time and presence as individuals to our Board affairs.* Both our time and our presence are required. And we are not talking about our formal Board meetings. Indeed, if we put in our time in an enlightened, organized way, our formal Board meetings become a minor portion of the action. We're talking about the time spent in doing our homework, our attendance at meetings such as this, our cross-sharing of experience with other boards (visits help), our general self-education. We're talking about time spent on the campus, of time in committee work, of time spent with students, faculty and administration so that we better know that

which we manage. If you allocate the time you'll find the points for constructive application. But it does take time.

It's clear the individual availability varies and that some members can put more time against our joint affairs then can others. But some sort of balance must be sought and all must participate to a significant degree. The trustee who finds his time and presence regularly constrained by other schedules or diverted by other interests should recognize that his role as a manager and policy-maker is significantly weakened – and that is what our job is all about.

- *We must give more attention to establishing a clear, effective interface with the administrators of our institutions.*

I use the term "interface" deliberately. This is the point at which we connect with the actual operation of the institution. We do not reach through; we do not move to active, administrative doing; we connect.

The administration is the executor of our policy determinations. From the administration comes feedback as to the effectiveness of policy application and signals as to revision and modification required. This should not be a casual exchange or one which encourages misinterpretation and misunderstanding – in either direction. Because we respect our administration and have warm, personal relationships with individuals, we too often consider unnecessary the establishing of clear, regularized channels of communication and stipulation of information desired, by either party.

This is being unfair to our administrators. They are already overburdened with operational tasks. They cannot stand perpetually "on call" for our needs. Nor can we wander randomly into the administrative precincts, browsing through their activities seeking information of interest to us.

It is completely feasible to regularize this interface flow by developing clear requirements for direction and information. It takes some time and thought. It's not as easy as it may appear. The requirements will differ in each institution. But we should get on with the task. It will make our board-administration relationships even warmer and happier.

- *More and improved staff work in preparation for Board meetings and in support of Board affairs can increase our Board efficiency.*

There are those who claim management by a board is inherently inefficient and should be accepted as such. I don't believe so. A board meeting need not be an intellectual quilting bee. The agenda can be developed well in advance. The matters for decision can be identified. The key elements of each question can be

highlighted and supporting information and recommendations prepared and presented in advance. I suggest two weeks. If this is properly done there should be no surprises at the meeting. Time can be spent in discussion of the key aspects of the issue, in confirmation of options available and in reaching decisions. This is management.

This same pattern should be carried down into the committee structure with somewhat less formality.

It is clear that someone must do this staff work and that this task falls upon the administration. Does this add to their burden? Not if they are doing their own jobs effectively. The material and staff analyses required are of the same nature they require themselves in their own spheres of activity. They too have interest and responsibility in these matters. It helps immensely if board and administration are working from the same supporting data and in the same framework for decision.

- *The Board's committee structure should be designed to carry the major work loads.*

The key word is "designed." We all have our committees and each of us may have membership on several. But committees must be more than friendly discussion groups engaged in pre-mastication of a problem before passing it to the Board for re-discussion as a committee-of-the-whole. There is nothing new in the roles for organizing and managing through a committee structure.

(1) Have as few standing committees as possible. Six is a good round number to shoot for.

(2) Use special committees as sparingly as possible. One of the standing committees can usually handle the task, and appointment of special committees is often a sign of confusion as to just what our problem is. If a special committee is necessary, give the committee a clear directive and set a firm date for termination.

(3) Only in exceptional circumstances assign a trustee to more than one standing committee. His interest will be concentrated and his time spent far more effectively.

(4) Require regular meetings, set firm agendas, provide adequate staff support, make decisions promptly on delegated matters and prepare documented recommendations on those matters requiring full board approval. Don't permit a committee to slide its work onto the Board as a whole.

(5) Keep complete committee records, document decisions, make sure that action items are properly passed through the administration interface and keep the entire Board informed through summary reports distributed between Board meetings.

(6) Tie the whole structure together with an Executive Committee with regular meetings and power to act between Board meetings.

You will tell me that we know all these things and are set up along these lines already. I doubt it, or that we really work to make it work. It's the task of really managing our own management. My own professional management experience leads me to the conclusion that we fail miserably on this point and we're too embarrassed to admit it. Yet this structure is the heart of our Board's operating efficiency, unsung and undramatic though it may be.

- *We must set aside time for relaxed exchange of views concerning inpending problem areas and future options.*

We've drawn a picture of a somewhat crisp, hopefully efficient, operating structure for our Board. This is our formal management decision-making structure. But this action structure omits one activity which I believe is required – desperately is not too strong a word – by us all as a *group* of trustees, not as the Board.

We need a time and place to just sit down and talk over and through critical areas of interest. What are trends in institutional governance and how do they apply to us? What are our debt management options and what are others doing? How about the balance between ever-rising tuition, cost containment measures and scholarships and grants?

Such subjects call for relaxed discussion, dwelling on a single area at some length. It's a sort of self-education in seminar style. It does not mix well in formal Board meetings where time and place constrain discussion. It requires its own time and place.

Our Board has recently set aside an afternoon or evening prior to our formal meeting for such exchanges – on a come-if-you-can basis. We think it's filled a void in our Board life. The atmosphere is relaxed in the absence of impending decision. The discussion is expansive and the enthusiasm contagious. We explore together, learn together and lay background for future decisions. Try it.

- *We must open better channels of communication with our various institutional constituencies.*

This ranks with motherhood as something to be for. Whether we agree or not, Board management activities have seemed a star chamber exercise to many of those who are involved in, support and love our institutions. These include students, faculty, administration, alumni, parents, financial supporters and the public at large. The subject deserves an entire paper. It should be noted here since it is critical to our continued acceptance as policy-makers and endorsers.

This is not a sterile release of information concerning decisions made and policy adopted. It is the person-to-person exposure that generates human acceptance, understanding and confidence. Subject matter is secondary to personal presence – another time consumer. As a trustee, if you put yourself in the path of personal encounters, you'll learn quite a bit – some of it discomfiting, some of it reassuring – about the attitudes and environment in which you manage.

But you have to program for it – in a subtle, unpressured manner – for it won't happen by accident. Try inviting students and faculty to your Board lunches. Invite some to selected "seminar" sessions. Have individual trustees discuss graduate or occupational interests with student groups. There are a host of catalyst subjects. The main goal is to achieve contact. And you have to program for it.

I regret that there is nothing grand in these six points. They are by no means all inclusive. You could add others. The points are not unique to the field of higher education. They must be shaped for their specific adaptation, but they hold true for a Board management of any enterprise. We know them. Let's get on with the task of managing our own management.

In closing my remarks I feel that I should voice a ringing challenge to all of us to move onward and upward to force that golden breakthrough into a new and enriched experience in higher education. It doesn't come to me. There will be no breakthrough – no sudden revelation to bring us wisdom to solve our problems. But it will take perspiration and patient dedication.

I've not talked of money problems. We certainly have them. I've not talked about dramatic changes in the way we educate. They must come and many constructive and provocative suggestions have been put on the table. My fundamental question is whether or not we know how to approach them, measure them, integrate them and pursue them. At times we talk over our own heads and are a bit ashamed to admit it. Let's get our feet on the ground.

Our first need is to develop a sound top management apparatus which can plan, direct, evaluate and control. This is our job – no one else's. The sooner done the sooner we will be able to move to confident and effective consideration and decision in the swirling world of higher education. The flower of wisdom flourishes in an orderly garden. Let's be about our business.

Money and Management: Urgent Decisions for Trustees

This paper and the two following complete the publication of the major addresses from the AGB meeting in Cincinnati, April 25-27, 1971. The other papers are in the May-June 1971 *AGB Reports*.